ETHICS AND ETHOS IN THE SELECT FICTIONAL WORKS OF JOHN STEINBECK

A

SYNOPSIS

SUBMITTED TO

PT. RAVISHANKAR SHUKLA UNIVERSITY, RAIPUR

FOR REGISTRATION OF THE DEGREE OF

Ph.D. IN

ENGLISH

UNDER THE FACULTY OF ARTS

2013

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1. Title of the Thesis: Ethics and Ethos in the Select Fictional Works of John Steinbeck

2. Introduction:

Steinbeck throughout his career was an ethical writer, concerned with right and wrong choices and their consequences. The majority of his writings, fictional or non-fictional, directly address the moral contortions of individual Americans, their social groups and the nation as a whole. His perception of America's rights and wrongs not only penetrates all aspects of American society but also extend to the deepest layers of individual societies. Through his fiction, he shows the inability of contemporary American Government, distorted values of corrupt business professionals and government officials. Steinbeck was not just a superb experimental stylist and social critic but also in many ways, the conscience of America. He was a moral philosopher who probed deeper than nearly any other writer the contours of individual and societal ethics.

3. A brief Review of the Works already done in the field:

A number of books have been published on Steinbeck depicting his various beliefs and ethics. The text of these books is being studied thoroughly. Some of the books are as follows: -

Levant, Howard. *The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study*: University of Missouri Press, 1974. Print.

Noble, R. Donald. *Critical Insights: John Steinbeck*: Salem Press, 2010. Print.

Singh, Hemlata E. *John Steinbeck's Novels: A Critical Understanding*: Adhyayan Publishers & Distributors, 2009. Print.

Besides this, secondary material is being collected also.

4. Objectives:

Steinbeck through his fictional works tries to determine what it takes for a human being to find happiness in true sense by exploring his naturalistic views. This research work will explore his modern ideas of success being achieved through means and path people adopt to accomplish it. This research will be worthy for society and it will be useful for the research scholars as it will provide scope for further research.

5. Noteworthy Contribution in the field of proposed work:

Benson, Jackson J. *The Short Novels of John Steinbeck: Critical Essays*: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.

Noble, R. Donald. *Critical Insights: John Steinbeck*: Salem Press, 2010. Print.

6. Proposed Methodology: Primary sources, secondary sources, various authentic documents and journals will be of used in this research work. The format and documentation is concerned, 7th edition of MLA Handbook for writers of Research Papers will be followed carefully.

7. Expected Outcome of the proposed work:

John Steinbeck's multidimensional ethical beliefs, social philosophy and his attempt to refine the human soul in order to procure happiness will be the focus of this research work. This thesis will contain following chapters tentatively:

I) Retracing the voyage of John Steinbeck

II) Social Consciousness and Sensibility

III) Nature and Spirituality

IV) Steinbeck's Cosmos: His Men and Women

V) His Craftsmanship

VI) In Retrospect

Chapter-I

Retracing the voyage of John Steinbeck

John Steinbeck, an American novelist and short story writer, is widely known for his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), *East of Eden* (1952) and the novella *Of Mice and Men* (1937). As the author of twenty-seven books, including sixteen novels, six non-fiction books, and five collections of short stories, Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962.

Steinbeck was born on 27th February, 1902 in Salinas, California. In 1925, he went to New York, where he tried for a few years to establish himself as a free-lance writer and later he returned to California. After publishing some novels and short stories, Steinbeck first became widely known with *Tortilla Flat* (1935) which was his first commercial success. His other famous novels are In Dubious Battles (1936), Of Mice and Men (1937), The Grapes of Wrath (1939), The Moon is Down (1942), The Pearl (1947), East of Eden (1952) and his travelogue *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (1962). Steinbeck's novels can all be classified as social novels dealing with social and economical problems of America.

Chapter II

Social Consciousness and Sensibility

In “California novels” and “Dust Bowl Fiction”, Steinbeck found his position. He used common folk set in the Depression Era, to reflect his social consciousness, telling of rural worker’s struggle. This chapter will reveal the impact of the Great Depression in contemporary United States and the plight of displaced migrant poor workers. Modern American literature is often defined by writers such as Steinbeck. In contemporary American scenario, social issues were at the forefront of American discourse. Steinbeck’s philosophy appears to be based upon the socialist theories of Lenin and Marx. Although, it shows clear

influence of several American philosophies. It is the enduring nature of Steinbeck's works that speaks the most of his social influences. This chapter will highlight the areas of societal issues such as poverty, sexuality and mental illness in order to help raise social consciousness in the novels of Steinbeck.

Chapter III

Nature and Spirituality

"We live in succession, in division, in parts, in wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and partical is equally relate; the eternal "ONE."

In his novels Steinbeck explores the idea of Oversoul and emphasizes in the harmony between natural environment and the human. He explored a concept similar to Emerson's Oversoul throughout his fictions. He recognized religion as an undeniable force in the life of his characters. In the opinion of Steinbeck human beings are the creatures of environment. Steinbeck has very deep love and attachment towards nature and spirituality. The symbolic contrasts between the vitality of land and the deadness of inanimate machines represent the theory of Jeffersonian agrarianism, which holds that the identification of human kind with soil is necessary for the continuation of the life cycle. This chapter will study his novels under the light of Nature, Spirituality and Metaphysics. This chapter will centralize upon the strong bond between Steinbeck's characters and nature. The chapter will also deal with the influence of nature that drives them towards humanity, a love for all persons and the embracing of mass democracy.

Chapter IV

Steinbeck's Cosmos: His Men and Women

Steinbeck's characters, his men and women exhibit a variety of behavior, understanding and experience. They continue, now so much as ever, to illuminate and

humanize an era for generations of readers who, thankfully, have no experimental point of reference for understanding the depression.

It is to be noted that his characters are “victimized by their illusions.” However, they realize only through these illusions whatever beauty, grace and meaning life hold for them. It is for this reason that they experience no sense of freedom when released from the grip of illusion to enter the world of reality. This chapter will focus on Steinbeck’s portrayal of male as well as female characters, whether for or against the author, and will point to the necessity and urgency of more serious and unbiased studies of the progress of his characters’ reticent quest for their fulfillment in Steinbeck’s oriented works.

Chapter V

His craftsmanship

John Steinbeck used dramatic narratives to express his views of the world. The characters’ behavior in his novels was used to keep the reader interested. It was through Steinbeck’s ability to use dramatic narratives he was able to describe his characters and their surroundings. Through his characters and their surroundings, Steinbeck was able to voice his views of society during his time as a writer. What makes Steinbeck's style unique is his dual use of omniscient narration combined with a real empathy for his characters. Steinbeck also writes with lyrical beauty of the Salinas Valley, a beauty that always runs as an undercurrent, no matter how tragic or tortured the action of the novel is. This chapter will thoroughly study Steinbeck’s uniqueness in his writing style and technique.

Chapter VI

In Retrospect

Steinbeck has shown a keen sensitivity towards common man, and problems related to society and economy. What he writes about friendship, courage and altruism seems based

on his positive acceptance of the goodness of man. His values are sympathy, compassion and humanity. According to Steinbeck, a man has to understand a man for a better and spiritual living. His fictions are deeply concerned with refining the mankind and for this purpose he expresses his views not only on the political or economical pattern but also studies the impact of nature on human behavior. His fictions contain imagination, humour and a sense of social responsibility. His themes cover a broad range of issues- social, political, cultural, moral, global and environmental. It may be concluded, then, Steinbeck is a man who has influenced whole generations of new writers, who remains as relevant today as in the 1930s, and who continues to touch readers from Kentucky to Kyoto.

8. Bibliography in Standard Format:

Primary Source-

Steinbeck, John. *In Dubious Battle*. New York: Penguin, 1965. Print.

---. *Of Mice and Men*. New York: Penguin, 1969. Print.

---. *The Grapes of Wrath*. Viking Press, 1970. Print.

---. *The Moon is Down*. Vanguard Press, 1975. Print.

---. *East of Eden*. New York: Morrow, 1984. Print.

---. *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*. Penguin, 1988. Print.

Secondary Sources-

Benson, Jackson J. *The Short Novels of John Steinbeck: Critical Essays*: Duke University Press, 2011. Print.

Levant, Howard. *The Novels of John Steinbeck: A Critical Study*: University of Missouri Press, 1974. Print.

Singh, Hemlata E. *John Steinbeck's Novels: A Critical Understanding*: Adhyayan Publishers & Distributors, 2009. Print.

9. List of published papers of the candidate: Nil

Signature of the Supervisor Signature of the Candidate

Forwarded

Chairman, DRC